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ITEM 7:* PROGRAMME MATTERS, INCLUDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

CONTRIBUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME TO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO ADDRESS AND MITIGATE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ACCIDENT AT THE CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Report of the Executive Director

Note by the Secretariat

The present brief report on UNEP's continued active participation in the international cooperation to address and mitigate the consequences of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant is submitted to the Governing Council for information as requested in its decision 16/10.

1. Efforts to address and mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl accident are proceeding at the international and national levels with the full support and cooperation of UNEP. The United Nations Secretariat for Chernobyl is coordinating the various projects, which necessarily must cover a broad spectrum of needs in terms of human health and settlements, social welfare, agriculture, industry and environment. The Inter-Agency Task Force, established in April 1991, has met several times, with UNEP participation, to inform, assist and coordinate the international projects. A Joint Plan covering 131 project proposals was formulated and presented at the Pledging Conference, held at United Nations Headquarters, New York, in September 1991. While only limited support could be secured at the time of the conference, negotiations with potential donors are continuing through the Chernobyl Secretariat.

2. It is recognized that the political changes in the former USSR are complicating the assistance efforts, and the underlying economic uncertainties are restraining the wider or deeper involvement of international agencies. However, every effort is being made by authorities in Belarus, Russian Federation and Ukraine to cooperate and facilitate the assistance programmes. Demand for the limited funds is great, and competing schemes have been proposed by the various institutes in the region. There must be a careful review to identify the most immediate needs.

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* Refers to the number of the item on the Provisional Agenda (UNEP/GC.17/1).

3. UNEP primarily supports and intends to remain involved in projects in the fields of human health, environmental studies and public information. Some of those activities have commenced; others are in the planning stage.

4. The International Programme on the Health Effects of the Chernobyl Accident (IPHECA) was established to study the long-term incidence of diseases that may have been caused by exposure to radiation during the accident. The epidemiological studies are of a long-term nature and incorporate aspects of early detection and treatment of leukaemia, thyroid cancer and other diseases. Initial support for the project has been provided by the Government of Japan. UNEP will work closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) to provide technical expertise on the environmental aspects of the work under the project.

5. Efforts to control the spread of environmental contamination from the accident have been largely successful. Changes in agricultural practices and the continued monitoring of foods ensure that the exposure of residents outside the 30 km exclusion zone lies within acceptable international standards. UNEP was represented on the Advisory Committee that conducted the International Chernobyl Project: Assessment of Radiological Consequences and Evaluation of Protective Measures. In 1991, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issued the report prepared on the conclusion of the project. UNEP continues to participate in the follow-up to the project through attending meetings of the Inter-Agency Committee on Response to Nuclear Accidents. In this way UNEP is able to report on its activities to other agencies, such as the WHO/UNEP Global Environmental Radiation Monitoring Network (GERMON), and ensure an adequate data flow to other agencies.

6. The numerous measurements of radiation levels in the environment surrounding Chernobyl provide the basis for many evaluations and scientific studies. UNEP will be supporting specific studies to establish a radiation database as part of the Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS), to carry out data management projects within the Global Resource Information Database (GRID), and to establish datasets for model development and validation.

7. In addition to scientific work, public information on the consequences of the Chernobyl accident is also needed. In 1991 UNEP sponsored the publication of the booklet "Radiation - Doses, Effects, Risks", which makes the assessments of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) available to a wide general audience. A publication about Chernobyl will be issued in 1993 by UNEP in the GEMS Environment Library series, and will contribute further to general information on the effects of radiation and nuclear accidents. Such information will help to put the risks from radiation in perspective and give some reassurance to those individuals most directly affected by the accident.

8. UNEP sees a broad, continuing role in supporting efforts to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. Its most effective role will be to increase recognition of the problems and to support the coordinated study and solution of the issues. The establishment of the joint United Nations/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices in Minsk and Kiev will facilitate the implementation of projects in the affected regions by allowing technical experts, including those from UNEP, to coordinate their activities better.